



**Success Indicator PI07:** Teachers and school leaders always send accessible communication (translated print and/or audio/video) about learning standards, their children's progress, and the parents' role in their children's school success. (5877)

**Overview:** These communications should include explicit information on school practices, procedures and policies that may be unfamiliar to immigrant families.

In order to support their children's learning, parents of English Learners (ELs) need accessible information not only on their child's academic achievement and behavior, but also on school practices, procedures and policies that may be unfamiliar to immigrant families. It may be challenging, however, for schools to share information with EL families and building home-school partnerships, as schools may face barriers such as a lack of translation resources, differences in cultural norms, and unexplained school reports sent home. (Arias, & Morillo-Campbell, 2018). These potential barriers can be eliminated or avoided by taking advantage of available local resources, creating and educating faculty and staff on multi-lingual communication systems and cultivating a mutually respectful partnership with EL parents.

**Questions:** What information do schools need to communicate to immigrant families about school practices, procedures, and student progress? How should this information be shared or conveyed?

**What information do schools need to communicate to immigrant families about school practices, procedures, and student progress?**

**Schools are required to share information** and engage parents who speak languages other than English in the same activities or services as they do with native English speaking parents (USDOJ & DOE, 2015). This includes:

- Registration and enrollment
- Report cards
- Discipline policies
- Special education and language assistance programs
- Gifted and talented programs
- Parent permission forms for student participation
- Parent handbooks
- Parent-teacher conferences

Schools are also responsible for informing parents about how their children are identified and assessed for English support services, what the criteria are for exiting ESL programs, and how student academic progress and language acquisition is being monitored and reported.

### *English Language Assessment (Identification)*

School districts are required to have standardized procedures in place to identify potential EL students and gather student background information upon enrollment. Then, districts must determine whether or not the student qualifies for ESL services through a nationally administered exam to assess English proficiency. If students qualify, they are entitled to participate in standardized instruction and receive appropriate language services.

During school enrollment, parents are given a home language survey. If they indicate that they speak a language besides English, schools can administer an English ability exam. While parent permission to assess EL students for special services is not required, parental notification of student assessment results and placement in an ESL program is required. A parent may not refuse specific instructional aid except in cases where the instruction conflicts with their religious beliefs. In that case, schools should provide a parental waiver form (“The Pennsylvania Code”, 2008).

When students are being assessed for English proficiency, schools are responsible for explaining to parents why their EL child is being assessed and how the assessment results will be used. Standardized language proficiency exams like ACCESS for ELLS 2.0 is an English language proficiency assessment for grades K-12. It is given yearly, scheduled upon school discretion, and helps schools identify entry level language skills across all content areas to monitor English language development. Approximately 73% of participating ESL programs use these scores to make placement decisions for immigrant students (Short & Boyson, 2012). The purpose of the test is to measure student ability to understand content and respond using English in four test sections: listening, reading, speaking and writing.

Schools must inform parents in their preferred language of their child’s identified status within 30 days of the beginning of the school year. They must describe which ESL program is recommended for their child and potential benefits of enrollment. Parents should be informed of their right to decline services, notified about annual test opt-outs, and provided with consistent updates on their child’s EL status and progress. Parents should also understand that, if they agree to the services, their child will receive English instruction and will take the test every

year until their score meets required proficiency.

### *Student Progress Monitoring (Academic and Language)*

Wormeli (2006) found that the most comprehensive academic reports include achievement scores based on classroom context, detail goals set for students based on performance and provide formative and summative assessments scores analyzed from state assessments and benchmark assessments. The U.S. Department of Education provides tools online for teachers and administrators to establish their EL monitoring system. The tools include benchmarks for growth so students who aren’t meeting benchmarks can be assisted. For example, Tool #1 monitors language processing skills. The corresponding form numerically rates performance in class like oral comprehension and then includes a comment section for teachers to recommend what students need help with, as well as next steps for accomplishing the recommendation (U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition, 2016). As Wormeli (2006) suggests, this form does not give a numerical rating without classroom context for parents to understand.

Providing materials in the home language may still inadvertently cause misinterpretation. EL parents often need support contextualizing information within America’s school culture. Schools and teachers should work together to provide EL parents with a progress update that reports on academic subjects that are most important, communicates student strengths and weaknesses, and is written in an accessible format (in home language and in friendly language). This helps parents understand their children’s progress because they will better understand specific learning standards and what is expected of their children (U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition, 2016).

### **How might this information be shared or conveyed?**

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) found that immigrant families felt most knowledgeable about school practices and procedures when schools outlined clear expectations at the beginning of the year. They found that three constructs shaped parent involvement:

1. Schools and parents construct a role of what parental involvement looks like and how parents will participate in their child’s activities.
2. Schools convey the message that parents can positively influence their children’s academic and social growth



### 3. Schools often extends invitations to events

It benefits schools and parents when schools are proactive in providing information on policies, procedures, and student learning. When questions arise about their children, many immigrant parents do not feel entitled to initiate contact with teachers or the school. As Ramirez (2003) shares, parents' own experiences greatly influence their expectations for school engagement. Ramirez found that low involvement of parents from community of Latino immigrants in California was due to their feelings they were not welcomed to take part in their children's education. Their children's school had not explicitly invited them, unlike schools had in their home countries.

#### *Collaborate with Community Organizations*

A case study by, Morillo-Campbell (2006) was conducted with Arizona parents whose children were enrolled in a school's Migrant Education Program (MEP). The program began as a means to provide children with basic clothing but transformed into a teacher and parent communication network. The study found that when the school communicated standard school policies and procedures through this organization, in this case helping students adhere to proper dress code, parents were able to understand expectations.

#### *Provide Technology Training*

When information is posted for public use, online for example, parents may not know how to access the webpage or check their emails for updates. Schools can provide technology training seminars so parents can make use of these new technologies to access information online. Shin and Seger (2016) reported that when parents successfully utilized technology, they go beyond receiving basic communication. In their case study, they investigated what happened when three Latino parents were taught how to participate online with their children's writing. The selected children would post their mediated writing activities online and their parents had the opportunity to reply with comments. All three parents used the blog to support their children's schoolwork, offer advice, and communicate with teachers about lessons. Using Web 2.0 tools, parents were able to support their children's academic success.

#### *Engage All Staff in Outreach*

Both parents and schools might have limited use, access, or skills in sending and receiving messages. Teachers

sometimes send crucial information home with children instead of directly contacting parents. Additionally, when teachers and administrators rely heavily on student or sibling translation, they cannot engage effectively with parents. In a case study by Gibson, Gándara, and Koyama (2004), researchers found that EL students often feel burdened when communication falls directly on them. Students reported that they sometimes forgot important information. This report found communication to be most effective when teachers and school officials contacted parents directly through letters, phone calls, parent/teacher conferences, and pre-approved visits outside of school. Schools might consider hiring staff that are multilingual and can serve as interpreters as well.

#### *Provide Family Education Opportunities*

Schools might provide parents with opportunities for informal literacy engagement, such as volunteer reading times, classroom visits, and library access. This encourages parents to feel comfortable in their children's school setting and offers practical opportunities for parents to convene in groups. Furthermore, families can learn English language sounds and grammatical conventions during this time. (Chen, & Harris, 2009). For example, in California, Comité de Padres Latinos (COPLA) was formed after parents decided they needed more information regarding their children's education. They created the Family Literacy Project, which helps parents and students become English proficient. Delgado-Gaitan (2001), noted that these literacy skills allowed parents to be active participants in their children's learning.

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